

A statement from the president of the Bloomington City Council

Friday, March 20, 2020

Dear friends and neighbors --

As the COVID-19 crisis overwhelmed the community in recent weeks, elected officials at every level have been working diligently to identify and anticipate its impacts on both individuals and businesses, and to find strategies to mitigate the worst of its consequences. The City of Bloomington and your City Council representatives are no exception.

Mayor Hamilton and his staff have begun by working to ensure the continuity of city government, so that services, from police and fire protection to sanitation and running water, would continue with as little disruption as possible. The administration has established a raft of protocols to prevent transmission of the disease among all city departments and buildings. City of Bloomington Utilities has discontinued service disconnections and is expanding support programs for customers who are unable to pay their bills. Parking is free for two hours per day at downtown meters and in surface lots for the duration of the emergency. (It is also important to note which services are not within the city's control, and where we must partner with other units of government. The city does not have a health department; that is the jurisdiction of the county. The city, which does not license restaurants and bars, did not presume the authority to force them to close; that took an action from the governor.)

The Council is only now getting its bearings, figuring out how to meet while simultaneously honoring open-door law and the social-distancing protocols required to minimize the spread of the novel coronavirus. The governor's recent Executive Order 20-04 now enables Council to meet even if most members are not physically present. As such, Council is planning to resume meeting, with a previously scheduled special session on March 25. While the agenda for that meeting was originally to discuss a water-bond refinancing, it will now begin with a public review of the local impact of the crisis, how the city has responded to it so far, and what needs to be done next. Members of the public can watch remotely on CATStv as in the past, but should also be able to participate remotely. (Details on remote participation will be posted on the Council's web page when they are ready.)

There is much, much more to do. To that end, last week I asked Councilmember Rollo to be Council's liaison to the continuity-of-city-government task force. And I have since asked two of the newly-formed council committees to take point on the crisis. The Climate Action and Resilience Committee (CMs Piedmont-Smith, Rollo, Rosenbarger, and led by CM Flaherty) will research and make recommendations over time on aiding the local public and not-for-profit sector. The Sustainable

Development Committee (CMs Rosenbarger, Sandberg, myself and led by CM Sgambelluri) will research and make recommendations over time on aiding the local private sector. Regarding the latter, and the potential role of Food & Beverage Tax funds in the crisis, I will be moving, as chair of the Monroe County Food and Beverage Tax Advisory Commission, to convene it to address the issue at the earliest possibility, which should be by the first half of next week.

I want to commend the Mayor, my colleagues, the County Commissioners and County Council, and employees of the city and county for their joint efforts to cope with a global crisis unprecedented in our lifetimes. We are all finding a new way forward. Please keep yourselves safe during the recommended isolation period, show kindness to one another, share your ideas with local-government representatives, and know that they are all doing their absolute best to address the myriad problems to come.

Stephen Volan
President, and Member, District VI
Common Council
City of Bloomington, Indiana